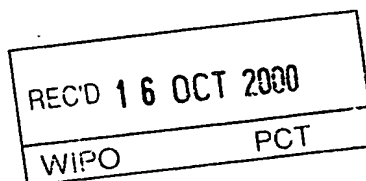




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Patent Office
Canberra

I, LEANNE MYNOTT, TEAM LEADER EXAMINATION SUPPORT AND SALES hereby certify that annexed is a true copy of the Provisional specification in connection with Application No. PQ3070 for a patent by DISCOUNTNET PTY LIMITED filed on 24 September 1999.

WITNESS my hand this
Tenth day of October 2000

LEANNE MYNOTT
TEAM LEADER EXAMINATION
SUPPORT AND SALES



**PRIORITY
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PATENTS ACT 1990

PROVISIONAL PATENT SPECIFICATION

THE INVENTION IS DESCRIBED IN THE ACCOMPANYING STATEMENT:

INTERACTIVE SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR VIEWING ADVERTISING WHILST ON LINE.

BACKGROUND

The present invention relates to Internet advertising and more particularly relates to a system and method which allows an on line consumer to elect to view advertising to defray or eliminate the cost of Internet time. The invention further comprises a system and method for enabling a consumer to electively receive advertising from an advertising provider and which may be specific to a predetermined consumer profile and without the need for the consumer computer to download enabling software (other than operational software) from the advertising provider. The system provides the consumer with credits, rewards, prizes or the like in return for viewing advertising, thereby allowing the consumer the option of directly or indirectly reducing Internet charges.

PRIOR ART

There are already in existence a variety of interactive Internet advertising systems which enable a consumer accessing the Internet to view advertising in return for payment by an advertising provider at least part of the costs of the consumers Internet time. The concept of viewing advertising on a consumer computer as a means to subsidise the cost of transmission of information is well known. More recently there has been an expansion of advertising on the Internet spawning interactive systems allowing a consumer to link to an advertising provider for receipt of advertisements to defray the costs of on line Internet access. The advertising is usually mixed with information and may be carried in a banner which appears on a computer screen and incidental to the main program operated by a user.

Banner advertising on the Internet is controlled by service and information providers who randomly introduce advertising during Internet browsing. The user has no control over this random advertising and cannot defray Internet costs by viewing the advertisements. In fact the

user can be distracted by the advertising from the users main search objective. A more recent alternative form of advertising involves interaction between an advertising provider and the target consumer in which the consumer is provided with advertising which might be tailored to suit a particular consumer profile and which enables the consumer to defray Internet costs by viewing the advertisements. In these systems the consumer has some control over and choice as to when and to what extent advertising is to be viewed. In return, the consumer is able to obtain free access to the Internet commensurate with the amount of advertising viewed. It is important when supplying mixed advertising and information not to make the advertising so intrusive that the consumer is unwilling to accept advertising as a trade off for free Internet access. One such interactive system has involved the embedding of advertising in the associated computer programs but these have the disadvantage that the advertising cannot be easily updated. These systems have been improved to allow convenient updating of the information for the benefit of the consumer and subject to the consumer profile. The updating takes place at a consumer work station. Advertising providers realised that consumers might be attracted by the idea of viewing advertisements in return for free internet access during periods where advertising is viewed. As an example of the known systems, United States Patent 5,774,869 discloses a method for promoting a sponsor's products by providing a consumer with sponsor paid access to the Internet. The method described utilises Internet access software which has a unique PIN number for each consumer computer. An Internet Entry Server verifies the PIN number and times the sponsor paid Internet access. In return, the Internet Entry Server performs a registration process which includes personal questions about the consumer, whereupon the sponsor gathers queries for response by the user and gives the user a guided tour of the sponsors Internet page where the user is exposed to current products and services of the sponsor. The user is then free

to browse the Internet and after the free time is over user paid refresh options are available. One disadvantage of this system is that the user is prevented from Internet browsing during the guided tour and is thus totally subservient to the sponsor for the period of the tour .

The system described is not user friendly in that each time the user wishes to connect to the Internet, he is obliged due to the system set up and the access software to take the guided tour. In that case should the user wish to abandon the sponsor paid Internet access, new Internet access software would need to be installed. Accordingly, under the system described, the user has no choice but to take the guided tour if the Internet access is to be sponsor paid. This disrupts the consumer during Internet browsing where the consumer wishes to offset Internet costs.

US Patent 5,446,919 discloses a communication system and method with demographically or psychographically defined audiences. This system employs a data base which contains information about audience members and selects the most appropriate media message for that audience.

US Patent 5,740,549 discloses an advertising distribution system including a data base which stores data which can be updated. The data base contains categorised advertisements. An information administrator in each work station establishes communication with the data server from time to time so as to update the information items and advertisements stored in local memory with at least a subset of the information items stored in the data server. The system further includes a subset of workstations including a profiler for storing data representing subscriber information and viewing preferences indicating categories for which the subscriber does and does not want to view information items. The user can select advertising information at will and the system will detect idleness criteria wherein the user fails to input for a predetermined amount of time. The object of the invention in that patent is to disseminate information and advertisements to subscribers' computers where the advertising and information is automatically displayed when the user's computer is on but meets predetermined idleness

criteria. The invention described in United States patent 5,740,549 was an attempt to mix advertising and information supply over the Internet in a manner which is acceptable to users and advertisers. The system is specifically intended to disseminate information during time periods when the users computer is inactive. ~~This system does not allow the user complete control over receipt of advertisements in circumstances where advertisements are not required. This system has the advantage however that the advertisements can be updated which is distinguishable from those systems in which the advertising is embedded in computer programs or reside in the programs and the information cannot be easily updated.~~

United States Patent No. 5,933,811 discloses a system and method for delivering customised advertising within the framework of an interactive communication system wherein an Internet consumer may have an Internet account credited each time the consumer views a custom advertisement. That system credits the consumer via the Internet provider based on the number of advertisements viewed by the consumer. This enables the Internet provider to use the advertising to to reduce consumer access fees. ~~The system described in this patent is relatively complicated in that it relies on direct interaction between the service provider, the consumer and the advertising provider via the consumers computer. The system is characterised in that the advertisement provider down loads not only a consumer member code but also a consumer control module which is stored on the consumers computer. The system operation is partially controlled at the consumer end which relies on the control module to determine interaction with the advertisement provider. Embedded advertisement requests in the consumer's computer directs the consumer computer to invoke the referenced content provider script and obtains the content provider member code. The enabling software is unique to the consumers computer and enhances the consumers browser so that custom advertisements can be merged with electronic~~

documents obtained from the content provider. The content provider websites must also register with the advertising provider before they can receive the customised advertisement services.

Each content provider creates a program called a content provider script and transfers an advertising request to the content provider which identifies the content provider script. The advertising request contains commands which invoke the content provider script. This system is relatively complex and is totally reliant on the efficacy of the enabling software. The objective of this system is to free content providers from having to generate advertising data, from having to contact individual advertisers and from having to maintain advertising administrative staff. In other words it places responsibility for advertising in the hands of another provider. The system is however, unduly complex and only indirectly benefits the consumer in that the consumer is reliant on the service provider to pass on the benefits the content provider derives from the link with the advertising provider.

Another known interactive Internet advertising system uses an advertisement serving engine which facilitates consumer access to advertisements in return for payment of a percentage of Internet on line costs. That system allows the consumer to view advertising whilst browsing the world wide web, working on a document or sending Email. The system however, involves a complicated registration system which requires the consumer to provide a profile and to download enabling software which controls the system. The consumer becomes 'locked in' and must signal the advertising provider when it does not want to receive advertisements rather than having the option of deciding when it will invite advertising. Once registration is effected, interaction with the site is constant until the consumer elects to bar advertising.

The ideal form of Internet advertising is that which allows the consumer the benefits of viewing advertising and at the same time obtaining credits on Internet connection costs. This objective

will only be attractive to the consumer where the advertising is relevant to the consumer, is not too intrusive on the consumer, can be controlled by the consumer without the consumer having to permanently submit to one advertising provider and can be achieved in the most uncomplicated manner without the need for the consumer to download proprietary software unique to the consumer. Furthermore, it is desirable for the consumer to have the flexibility to elect when it will view advertising rather than having to positively cancel advertising when it does not wish to view advertisements.

INVENTION

The present invention provides a simple alternative to the known interactive advertising systems by providing an interactive advertising system which allows a consumer to exercise complete control over receipt of advertisements and the benefits of Internet access credits commensurate with extent of exposure to advertising. According to the invention there is provided a system for interactive exposure to advertising on line wherein the system comprises; a consumer computer in communication with an advertising supplier computer, wherein the consumer elects to view advertising in response to an invitation from the advertising provider whereupon the advertising provider supplies advertisements to the consumer whilst the consumer is receiving information from an information provider, wherein the system operates without the need to download proprietary software unique to the consumer and wherein the consumer is credited with cash rewards, prizes or credits for the costs of internet access commensurate with the amount of advertising viewed.

In one broad form the present invention comprises:

an interactive advertising system for a consumer computer at the option of a consumer,
an advertising provider computer in communication with said consumer computer whilst the consumer is obtaining information from an information provider, the system including a

consumer computer in communication with an information provider, wherein the advertising provider computer communicates with said consumer computer via the advertising providers web site upon election by said consumer responsive to an invitation from said advertising provider; wherein, without requiring enabling consumer oriented software downloaded to the consumer's computer, the consumer receives said advertising material by responding to a random invitation from the advertising provider appearing on the consumer computer screen after the consumer has registered with the advertising provider by forwarding to the provider the consumer's Email address; said random invitation appearing as a flashing icon on the screen of the consumer computer and including a predetermined idleness criteria such that in the event the consumer computer fails to respond to the random invitation within a predetermined period, the invitation will cancel itself and reappear randomly at a later time on the consumer's computer screen allowing the consumer repeated opportunity to elect whether to receive advertising material whilst on line; the system thereby allowing the consumer to view advertising simultaneously with Internet information at the option of the consumer, thereby allowing the consumer to offset the cost of Internet time commensurate with the extent of exposure by the consumer to advertising messages.

In another broad form the present invention comprises:

an interactive advertising system for a consumer computer at the option of a consumer, an advertising provider computer in communication with said consumer computer whilst the consumer is obtaining information from an information provider, the system including a consumer computer in communication with an information provider, wherein the advertising provider computer communicates with said consumer computer via the advertising providers web site upon election by said consumer responsive to an invitation from said

advertising provider; wherein, without requiring enabling consumer oriented software downloaded to the consumer's computer, the consumer receives said advertising material by responding to a random invitation from the advertising provider appearing on the consumer computer screen after the consumer has registered with the advertising provider by forwarding to the provider the consumer's Email address; said random invitation appearing as a flashing icon on the screen of the consumer computer and including a predetermined idleness criteria such that in the event the consumer computer fails to respond to the random invitation within a predetermined period the consumer will not receive advertising and thus credits, cash, prizes or like incentives, whereupon the invitation will reappear randomly at a later time on the consumer's computer screen allowing the consumer repeated opportunity to elect whether to receive advertising material whilst on line; wherein upon acceptance by the consumer of advertising by signaling the advertising provider, advertisements will be sent to the consumer's computer for a predetermined random period following which the advertisements will be suspended until reactivated by the consumer by signalling the advertising provider; the system thereby allowing the consumer to view advertising simultaneously with Internet information at the option of the consumer, thereby allowing the consumer to receive credits, prizes or like or to offset the cost of Internet time commensurate with the extent of exposure by the consumer to advertising messages; the system operable without the need for the consumer to download specific software.

Preferably, the invitation comprises a flashing icon such that when the icon is flashing, the consumer is not receiving advertising nor credits, rewards, prizes etc for viewing said advertising.

In another broad form of the method aspect the present invention comprises:

a method for elective viewing by a consumer of advertisements provided by an advertisement

provider whilst the consumer is on the Internet such that the consumer can optionally view advertisements whilst viewing information supplied by an information provider to defray the costs of the Internet on line time, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) connecting a consumer computer to an information provider computer via the Internet,
- b) establishing a link to a web page of an advertising provider via the information provider computer;
- c) sending particulars of the consumer computer such as the computer's Email address to the advertising provider to establish a link between the consumer computer and the advertising provider computer,
- d) receiving at the consumer's computer from the advertising provider computer a randomly displayed invitation to receive advertising material at the option of the consumer whilst the consumer is receiving information from an information provider;
- e) allowing said random invitation to display on the consumer's computer for a predetermined length of time, whereupon;
 - i) in the event that the consumer ignores the invitation to receive advertising material, the invitation will cease after a predetermined period of idleness and will reappear again at a random time allowing the consumer subsequent opportunities to accept the invitation to receive advertising,
 - ii) in the event that the consumer accepts the random invitation from the advertiser to receive advertisements from the advertising provider, the consumer will receive on the consumer's computer screen an advertising banner which will display advertising targeted to the consumer profile

until such time as the consumer cancels the advertising;

- f) in the event of selection of option e) ii) the advertising provider will credit the consumer for the cost of the on line time of the Internet connection commensurate with the amount of time spent by the consumer viewing advertising provided by the advertising provider.

In another broad form of the method aspect the present invention comprises:

a method for elective viewing by a consumer of advertisements provided by an advertisement provider whilst the consumer is on the Internet such that the consumer can optionally view advertisements whilst viewing information supplied by an information provider to defray the costs of the Internet on line time, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) connecting a consumer computer to an information provider computer via the Internet,
- b) establishing a link to a web page of an advertising provider via the information provider computer;
- c) sending particulars of the consumer computer such as the computer's Email address to the advertising provider to establish a link between the consumer computer and the advertising provider computer,
- d) receiving at the consumer's computer from the advertising provider computer a randomly displayed invitation to receive advertising material at the option of the consumer whilst the consumer is receiving information from an information provider;
- e) allowing said random invitation to display on the consumer's computer for a predetermined length of time, whereupon;
 - i) in the event that the consumer ignores the invitation to receive advertising

- material, the invitation will remain as a randomly flashing icon and will reappear again at a random time allowing the consumer subsequent opportunities to accept the invitation to receive advertising,
- ii) in the event that the consumer accepts the random invitation from the advertiser to receive advertisements from the advertising provider, the consumer will receive on the consumer's computer screen an advertising banner which will display advertising targeted to a predetermined parameter such as the consumer profile, post code or Email address; whereupon after a predetermined period of supplying advertising unknown to the consumer, the advertising provider will cease provision of advertisements and will re activate the invitation to the consumer to request supply of the advertisements;
- f) in the event of selection of option e) ii) the advertising provider will during the period of provision of advertisements credit the consumer with cash, rewards prizes or equivalent or with the cost of the on line time of the Internet connection commensurate with the amount of time spent by the consumer viewing advertising provided by the advertising provider.

In another broad form the present invention comprises:

an interactive advertising system for a consumer computer at the option of a consumer, an advertising provider computer in communication with said consumer computer whilst the consumer is obtaining information from an information provider, the system including a consumer computer in communication with an information provider, wherein the advertising provider computer communicates with said consumer computer via the advertising providers web site upon election by said consumer responsive to an invitation from said

advertising provider; wherein, without requiring enabling consumer oriented software downloaded to the consumer's computer, the consumer receives said advertising material by responding to an invitation from the advertising provider appearing on the consumer computer screen after the consumer has registered with the advertising provider by forwarding to the provider the consumer's Email address; said random invitation appearing as a flashing icon on the screen of the consumer computer, wherein said icon will continue flashing until said consumer elects to receive credits by viewing advertisements provided by the advertising provider, wherein, in the event the consumer computer responds to the flashing icon the icon will cease flashing whereupon the consumer will gain credits, prizes, rewards or the like when viewing said advertising; the system thereby allowing the consumer to view advertising simultaneously with Internet information at the option of the consumer, thereby allowing the consumer to either gain credits or to offset the cost of Internet time commensurate with the extent of exposure by the consumer to advertising messages.

In another broad form of the method aspect the present invention comprises a method for elective viewing by a consumer of advertisements provided by an advertisement provider whilst the consumer is on the Internet such that the consumer can optionally view advertisements whilst viewing information supplied by an information provider to defray the costs of the Internet on line time, the method comprising the steps of:

- a) connecting a consumer computer to an information provider computer via the Internet,
- b) establishing a link to a web page of an advertising provider via the information provider computer,
- c) sending particulars of the consumer computer such as the computer's Email address to the advertising provider to establish a link between the consumer

computer and the advertising provider computer,

- d) receiving at the consumer's computer from the advertising provider computer a randomly displayed invitation to receive advertising material at the option of the consumer whilst the consumer is receiving information from an information provider;
- e) allowing said random invitation to display on the consumer's computer for a predetermined length of time, whereupon;
 - i) in the event that the consumer ignores the invitation to receive credits, prizes or rewards for viewing advertising material, the invitation will remain as a randomly flashing icon until the consumer signals said advertising provider that it wishes to receive said credits, rewards prizes or the like in return for viewing said advertising,
 - ii) in the event that the consumer accepts the invitation from the advertiser to receive credits, prizes or rewards for viewing advertisements from the advertising provider, the consumer will continue to receive on the consumer's computer screen on an advertising banner advertisements, whereupon after a predetermined period of obtaining credits, rewards, prizes etc for viewing advertising said icon will start flashing indicating that the consumer is no longer receiving credits, rewards or prizes for viewing advertising sent to the consumer computer,
- f) in the event of selection of option e) ii) the advertising provider will during the period of provision of advertisements credit the consumer with cash, rewards prizes or equivalent or with the cost of the on line time of the Internet connection commensurate with the amount of time spent by the consumer viewing advertising

provided by the advertising provider during a predetermined reward period.

According to a preferred embodiment, the invitation to the consumer appearing on the consumer computer to receive advertising from the advertising provider is a flashing icon which the consumer may either click on or answer by an alternative means such as a key stroke or another signal which signals to the advertising provider whereupon, the advertising provider matches with the particular consumer's Email particulars whereupon the advertising provider supplies advertising to the consumer computer until the consumer cancels the advertising.

One advantage of the above system is that the consumer computer does not require unique software to access the advertising material.

In another broad form the present invention comprises:

an interactive system for accessing from a consumer computer at the option of a consumer, advertising material supplied by an advertising provider in communication with said consumer computer whilst the consumer computer is obtaining information from an information provider; the system including a consumer computer which at the option of the consumer, establishes communication with an information provider computer responsive to an invitation from the advertising provider computer,

an advertising provider which communicates with said consumer computer via the advertising providers web site upon election by said consumer in response to an invitation from said advertising provider; wherein the consumer receives without the need for enabling consumer oriented software downloaded to the consumer computer, said advertising material by responding to a random invitation from the advertising provider appearing on the consumer computer screen after the consumer has registered with the advertising provider by forwarding to the provider the consumer's Email address and /or such data as consumer's postcode; said

random invitation appearing as a flashing icon on the screen of the consumer computer near a banner advertisement such that in the event the consumer responds to the random invitation within a predetermined period, advertising will be sent to the consumer's computer for a random period of time unknown to the consumer allowing the consumer repeated opportunity to elect whether to receive advertising material whilst on line; the system thereby allowing the consumer to view advertising simultaneously with Internet information at the option of the consumer thereby allowing the consumer to gain credits, cash, rewards, prizes or the like or to offset the cost of Internet time commensurate with the extent of self determined exposure by the consumer to advertising messages.

In another broad form the present invention comprises;

an interactive system for transmitting advertisements from an advertising provider to a consumer computer via the Internet, the system comprising;

a consumer computer capable of establishing an Internet connection with an information provider;

an advertisement provider computer capable of establishing a connection with a consumer computer,

a registration module at the advertisement provider's computer for receiving data including the consumer computer's Email address and or data from the consumer to identify and profile the consumer, such as post code;

an icon or like indicia at the consumer computer delivered by the advertising provider to allow the consumer the option of receiving advertising from the advertising provider by signalling via that icon or indicia that the consumer wishes to receive advertising;

means at the advertisement provider's computer to identify a received signal as that of a

particular consumer when the consumer signals the advertising provider via said icon its desire to

receive advertising,

means at the advertisement provider computer to terminate the icon or like indicia in the event that a predetermined period of idleness of the icon or indicia is detected where the consumer does not signal via the icon or indicia of its request for advertising material whereupon the advertising provider's computer permanently or temporarily terminates the display of the icon or indicia whereupon after a predetermined period of time has elapsed, the icon will reappear on the consumer's computer allowing the consumer the option of electing to view advertising; whereupon in the event that the consumer elects to view advertising material, the advertising provider will provide to the consumer, credit, cash, rewards, prizes or the like commensurate with the amount of time spent by the consumer viewing advertisements.

The present invention will now be described according to a preferred but non limiting embodiment and with reference to the accompanying illustrations wherein;

Figure 1 shows schematic layout of the system according to one embodiment of the invention; and

Figure 2 shows a block diagram of system processing according to a preferred embodiment.

Figure 1 shows a schematic layout of an interactive communication system according to a preferred embodiment of the invention. The system shown comprises a consumer computer 1 capable of browsing the Internet via a service or information provider computer 2. Included in the system is an advertising provider computer 3 which is accessible to the consumer computer 1 via the service provider computer 2. Consumer computer 1 is linked to provider computer 2 in the usual manner by dialling an information provider's computer, whereupon the consumer computer 1 gains access to the webpage of an advertising provider. The consumer interacts with the web page to register for future receipt of advertisements.

Figure 2 shows a block diagram of the processing required for a consumer to access and use the system. In order to operate the system, the consumer must link the consumer computer 1 to information provider computer 2. This is done in the usual manner by dialing any standard service provider via known communication protocols. Once the consumer is connected to the Internet the consumer is free to visit selected web sites. The consumer will normally be charged by the information provider for Internet on line time. The consumer utilising the system of the present invention has the option of receiving credits, cash, rewards or prizes or reducing Internet costs by electing to view advertising but it is the way in which the consumer interacts with the advertising supplier which distinguishes this system from the known systems. As previously indicated, the known systems are unduly complicated to set up, are intrusive and do not allow the consumer sufficient choices in respect of control over the supply of advertising. In use, once the consumer is connected to the internet the consumer accesses the selected advertiser's web site which has prompt instructions for registration.

Registration is according to the invention, a simple process of the consumer calling up the advertisers web site and electing to send its E mail address to enable the advertiser to identify the particular consumer. The consumer may also send a profile so that advertisements can be tailored to suit the consumer. With the simple act of sending the consumer's Email address to the advertising provider, the consumer will be automatically registered whereupon the advertising provider will then send a facility to the consumer for containing advertisements and including an icon which acts as an invitation to the consumer to elect whether to receive advertisements.

At this point, the consumer has a choice as to whether to ignore or to respond to the invitation. Should the consumer ignore the invitation, no advertising or benefits of viewing the advertising will be received. The icon will providing a renewed invitation to the consumer to

view advertising, the invitation appearing in the form of a flashing icon.

In practice, the consumer would be unlikely to register then perpetually ignore the invitation to receive advertising. The system allows for random re appearance of the invitation to receive advertising. Should the consumer choose to receive advertising, the advertising provider will send advertisements to the consumer until either the consumer elects to cancel the advertisements or until such time as a predetermined random time period has elapsed whereupon the advertisements and benefits will be terminated until the consumer elects to receive further advertisements.

According to another embodiment, the system provides for advertising to be constantly sent to the

~~consumer computer for which the consumer will not be credited for viewing until such time as~~
the consumer accepts an invitation in the form of a flashing icon to signal via the icon to the advertising provider that the consumer wishes to receive credits, rewards or prizes for viewing the constantly transmitted advertising whereupon the icon will cease flashing for a predetermined period unknown to the consumer. The advantage of the system described above is that it does not require proprietary software and the consumer can control; whether it receives advertisements once registered.

Preferably, there may be one advertisement distributed to the consumer per minute and the advertising could be available for random times unknown to the consumer such as but not limited to between 5 and 30 minutes to ensure the consumer actually views the advertisements.

It will be recognised by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and modifications may be made to the invention as broadly described herein without departing from the overall spirit and scope of the invention.

Dated this 24 day of September 1999

DISCOUNTNET PTY LIMITED

By its Patent Attorneys

WALSH & ASSOCIATES

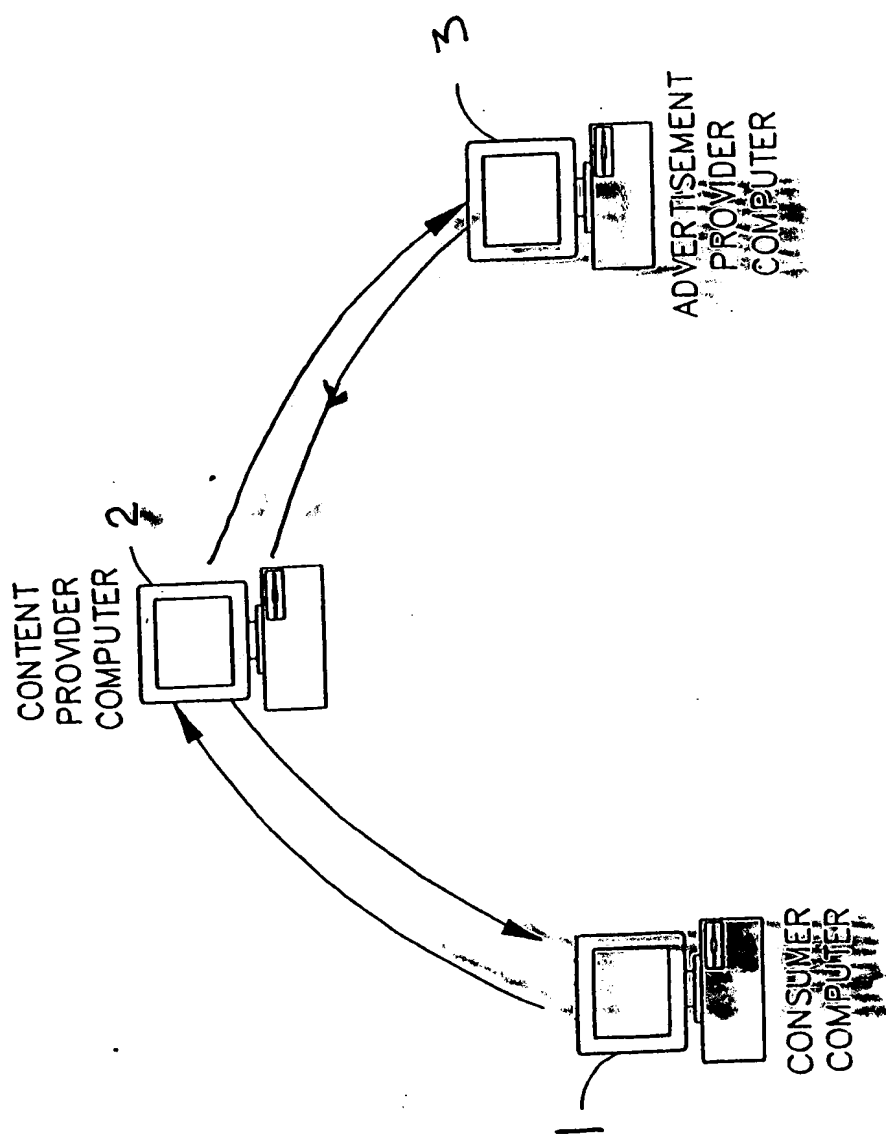


FIGURE 1

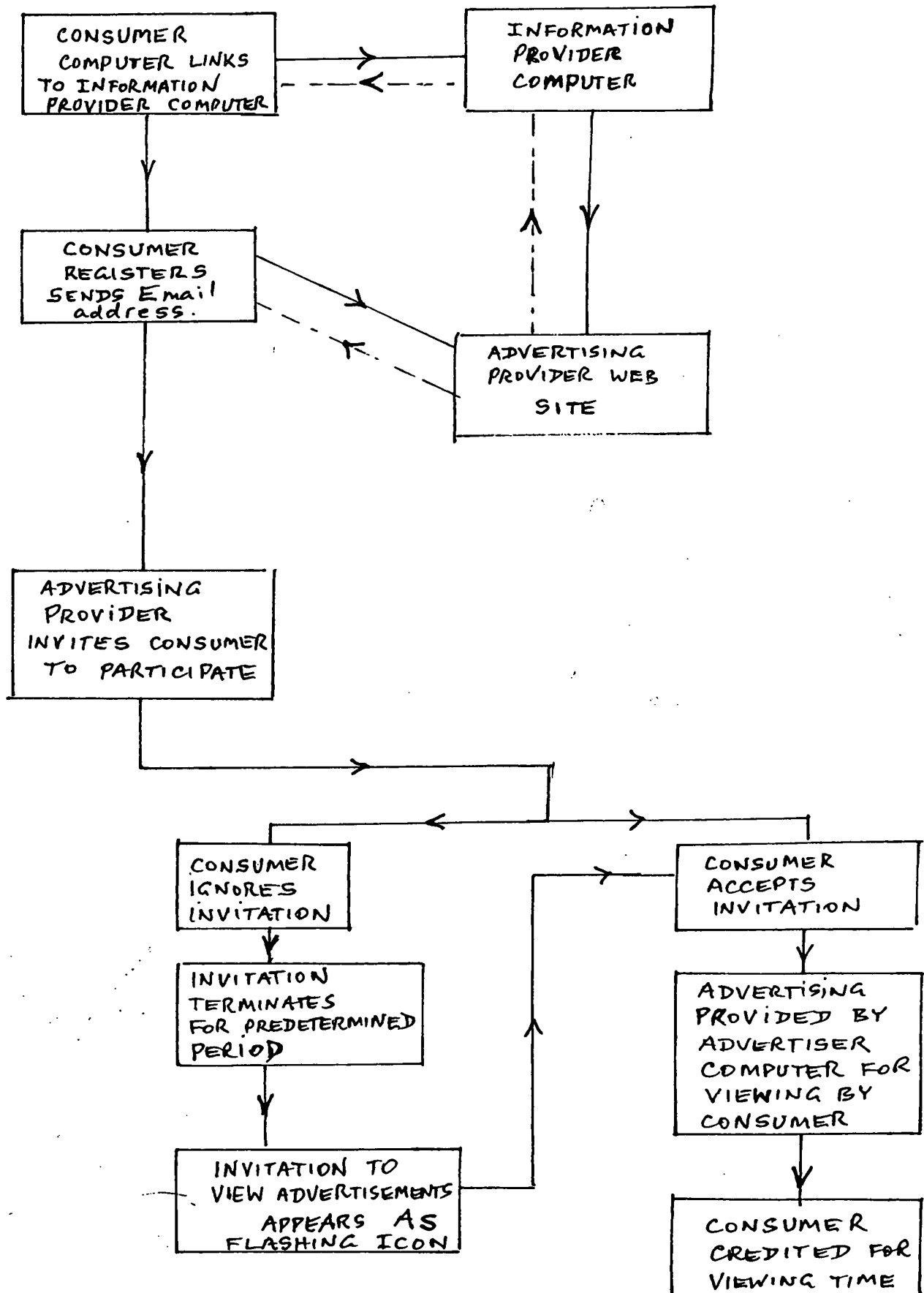


FIGURE 2

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